
GENERAL HOMELESS INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS

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SOURCES FOR FUNDING

Imagine the Possibilities--Sources for Funding

While many of the have been initiated by districts that receive funding through the McKinney Act, districts certainly are not limited to using only those funds to develop programs to serve children in homeless situations. Other federal sources, as well as state and local educational funds, may be used to fund certain qualifying activities.

The ***Title I--Helping Disadvantaged Children Meet High Standards Program*** includes provisions for serving children in homeless situations. Since a majority of schools in the country receive funding through this program, it is a strong candidate for providing resources to assist students without homes. Many districts combine McKinney funds and Title I funds to expand services to students experiencing homelessness. One large urban district in Texas combines these funds, along with assistance from AmeriCorps, to provide a Reading Recovery program to students without homes.

As another example, the ***Title II--Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Grant Program*** specifies that "Special attention must be given in professional development activities to ensure that education professionals are knowledgeable of, and make use of, strategies for serving populations that historically have lacked access to equal opportunities for advanced learning and career advancement." Title II funds might therefore be used to train teachers to develop teaching strategies to meet the needs of students who move frequently.

Many times students in homeless situations are exposed to violence and are reluctant to go to school because they have to traverse dangerous areas. Funding from ***Title IV--Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities***, a program designed to prevent violence in and around schools and prevent drug abuse by young people, might be used to create an environment where students without homes feel safe and secure.

Beyond traditional resources such as these, districts must seek assistance from a host of public and private organizations, foundations, businesses, churches, and other entities. Many groups recognize the devastating effects of homelessness and have set aside funding to address specific problems of people experiencing homelessness. As an example, churches in one urban community set up a foundation to provide various assistance to people in homeless situations. One of their projects involves working with the local school district, a regional education service center, VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) volunteers, and a transitional housing operator to provide an after-school extended program at a transitional housing facility. Alone, none of the partners had the resources needed to conduct the program. As a group, they developed a comprehensive program that works for the students and parents who live in the transitional facility.

These are just a few examples of funding sources that can be used to develop effective programs that meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness. By working together creatively, schools and communities can help to piece the puzzle together--one student at a time, one family at a time.

CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Although primarily correlated with growing rates of childhood poverty and domestic violence, homelessness among children and youth is the result of an almost infinite variety of specific circumstances. These children and youth share a precarious living environment; however, the roads that lead to this environment are as diverse as the children themselves. Some of the other common reasons why children, youth, and families fall into homeless situations include the following:

- lack of affordable housing
- unemployment
- underemployment
- physical, mental, and substance abuse
- mental illness
- lack of education
- lack of high-level job skills
- catastrophic physical illness
- natural disaster

Often, several of these factors may combine, resulting in homelessness. For example, if a laborer who makes adequate wages suddenly loses his job, he may not be able to secure another position that pays well enough to support his family. His education and job skills may be inadequate to meet the demands of the labor market. Suddenly, the family can no longer afford its home and ends up doubling up with friends or relatives, living in a shelter, or worse yet, living in a car or on the streets.

Youth on their own may become homeless for different reasons:

- Parents may throw them out of the home because they refuse to follow the rules, or in the case of young women, because they are pregnant.
- Youth may choose to leave because they are physically, mentally, or sexually abused.
- Youth may choose to leave because they cannot cope with their parents' substance abuse.
- Youth may choose to leave because they do not want to follow their parents'/caregivers' rules.
- Youth may leave because they do not get along with a parent's new spouse or significant other.

EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES CAUSED BY HOMELESSNESS

- Because students without homes are frequently embarrassed by their situation, they are reluctant to make friends or participate in class discussions or other activities. In short, they do not want to call attention to themselves or their living arrangements.
- Students who are experiencing homelessness often feel isolated by their situation. They may be living in a car, in a tent, in an abandoned building, in a motel, or in another nontraditional setting where there are few other people, especially young people.
- Often, children and youth in precarious housing situations become close to someone, such as a peer or a teacher, only to be yanked away from that person at a moment's notice. They become reluctant to make friends or develop relationships with others.
- Students without homes often suffer at the hands of students in permanent and stable housing arrangements when disparaging remarks are made about clothing, personal hygiene, or living conditions.
- Students who have been exposed to violent living situations may act aggressively and may not understand how to resolve disputes peacefully.
- Students with free or reduced cost meal plans are often embarrassed if their meal tickets are distinguishable from other tickets. Their privacy should be protected so that other students and food service personnel cannot cause them undue embarrassment.
- Students in homeless situations usually cannot afford to purchase basic school supplies, such as paper, notebooks, crayons, scissors, physical education clothing, and so forth.
- Students may be embarrassed or feel stigmatized if they are given a standard packet of supplies and materials that can be recognized as that given to students who are economically disadvantaged.
- Students in homeless situations may not have access to mental health counseling that could assist them in dealing with stresses caused by homelessness.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES

Schools can...

- Review and revise policies, practices, and procedures in order to remove barriers to access and success in school for children and youth living in homeless situations.
- Coordinate and collaborate with shelters and other homeless service providers to help remove barriers and ensure that children and youth in homeless situations acquire prompt access to services in the community.
- Provide awareness training to all levels of district and school personnel about the McKinney Act and the educational and related needs of children and youth in homeless situations.
- Provide supplemental educational programs, such as before- and after-school, weekend, holiday, and summer programs, for children and youth in homeless situations.
- Appoint a homeless coordinator whose responsibilities can include: 1) provide outreach where children who are experiencing homelessness live, 2) establish collaborations to connect families with available services in the community, and 3) work closely with families to expedite enrollment, assessment, and referrals in school.
- Ensure that children and youth have access to the materials and supplies, including school supplies, clothes, and hygiene products, that they need to attend and succeed in school.
- Provide transportation to children in homeless situations (even when the child lives close to school) when shelters or living arrangements are in dangerous environments or when children would otherwise be unable to attend school.
- Develop and disseminate informational materials and make presentations on the legal protections, educational programs, and community services available to children and youth in homeless situations in a manner and language that parents and caregivers can understand.

APPOINT A HOMELESS COORDINATOR

In districts that operate successful programs to serve students in homeless situations, there is one common denominator: a homeless coordinator. Whether funded through the McKinney program or another source, the liaison is the person who orchestrates opportunities for students and families to begin to break the cycle of homelessness. Any district serious about improving services to students without homes must appoint a committed individual who will:

- Learn about the district -- its demographics, its policies and procedures regarding student enrollment, its special programs and services, its relationships with other service providers in the community.
- Visit each school with which they will work and meet the principal, secretary, counselor, teachers, enrollment clerks, attendance officers, bus drivers, and other staff. Establish a positive, personal rapport with these individuals and learn about the school -- its strengths and weaknesses, its attitude toward students, its climate, and of course, its enrollment policies and procedures and its special programs and services. To complete their introduction, they must interact with students.
- Become familiar with the community -- the low-income neighborhoods; areas where people without homes might be found; areas where young people who have dropped out of school might congregate during the day; locations of public laundry facilities, campground locations, food banks, soup kitchens, and shelters; Head Start centers; migrant housing developments; public housing complexes; daily or weekly low-cost motels; and other areas. They must talk with people who operate services or programs in these areas and with the people who use the services.
- Locate and meet with agencies, organizations, churches, and businesses that serve families, children, and youth who are experiencing homelessness. They must become actively involved with these entities and learn where to refer students and families for housing, health care, counseling, employment assistance, child care, food, and clothing. If there is a local homeless coalition, they must join it. If not, they might become the catalyst that sparks the formation of a coalition.
- Conduct a needs assessment, informally and/or formally, and consider a variety of factors: Who in their district is without a home? Why? What needs do they have: educationally, emotionally, physically, and mentally? What resources are available to help, beyond resources through the McKinney Act? What service gaps exist?
- After gathering information, put together a service plan, involving key players from the school, the community, and the population experiencing homelessness to work on its development.

- Implement the plan and deliver educational and social services to the students and families based on an accurate assessment of the needs of their clients.
- Provide professional development activities for district personnel at all levels: from top administrators to teachers to clerical staff to other support staff to make them aware of the special needs of students without homes.
- Speak at service club luncheons, religious service organization meetings, and business association meetings to educate these groups about the causes of homelessness, its impact on students and their families, and how these organizations might provide assistance.

HOMELESS COORDINATOR: OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Employ social workers to function as homeless coordinators. By using a case management approach, these social workers can bring together a multitude of resources to assist families and students in transition.
- Social workers can teach families and students how to advocate for themselves in future situations where assistance may not be readily available to them.
- Encourage homeless coordinators to become members of advisory committees to housing agencies to ensure that educational needs of students are considered in making housing appropriate placements.
- Ensure that children, youth, and families who are experiencing homelessness feel comfortable with the liaison and can establish a productive rapport with the liaison.
- If the population to be served is proficient in a language other than English, then the liaison should be able to communicate with the family or student in that language.
- Any material should be available in English and the other languages spoken in your area. In many places, it is important to have Spanish versions of any outreach documents. In some parts of the country, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, and other languages would be appropriate for outreach material.
- Coordinators should publicize their services to a wide audience through various means: posters, brochures, local public service announcements, newsletters, and attendance at meetings of groups that would be interested in their services, such as the local homeless coalition.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP HOMELESS STUDENTS SUCCEED IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Provide the homeless child or youth the same educational opportunities and instructional services as provided other students, including compensatory education, individualized instruction, etc.
2. Become sensitized to the problems and concerns of homeless students and their families so as to be in a better position to offer assistance.
3. Include homeless students as a regular part of the class—avoid singling them out because of their homelessness.
4. Become informed about available school, health, community and county programs, services and resources so that appropriate referrals for assistance can be made when necessary.
5. Assist other students in the class to become properly informed about homelessness in order to do away with old myths, stereotypes, beliefs and teasing and joking about the homeless.
Examples:
 - As one of the class topics or projects, discuss some of the causes of homelessness; who is homeless, etc.
 - Do not permit negative comments to be made by students about homeless people without presenting correct facts about the homeless.
6. As an advocate for children, make known to appropriate sources, the special needs of homeless students, or make recommendations for services or programs to be provided or set up in order to help homeless students.
7. Reinforce proper and regular study habits so that homeless students are better able to keep up with class activities.
8. Become knowledgeable about the characteristics and attitudes of homeless students so that you can recognize the homeless child or youth in your class and take steps to make the most of the time that he or she is in your class.
9. Provide as many successful experiences as possible, and use praise judiciously, but often so as to help improve students' poor self-images.
10. Homeless children have little or no structure in their everyday lives.
11. Remember that homeless children may not have access to television sets or other resources normally available in the home and as a result homework assignments requiring access to such resources, may not be complete.

12. Remember that homeless students may often be in the classroom experiencing hunger or malnutrition due imbalance or irregular meals.
If homeless children, as well as other students with special needs (migrants, transfers), enroll in the school throughout the academic year, consider setting up a pal or buddy system to show these students around the school and to introduce them to others.
13. Homeless children and youth are often without school supplies. Consider having welcome packages available for the homeless student by keeping extra supplies (pens, pencils, paper) on hand to give these students.

PROMOTE AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING WITHIN SCHOOLS

- Educate local school boards about the difficulties and challenges that homelessness presents for students so that boards will support policy changes to remove barriers for students without homes.
- Provide awareness activities at district-wide professional development training sessions.
- Encourage school personnel to visit shelters in the school's attendance zone so that they will gain a better understanding of their students' living situations.
- Invite staff from shelters, food banks, homeless coalitions, and other service agencies and organizations to conduct sensitivity training for school staff.
- Remind teachers that students without homes may be unable to complete homework assignments because of their circumstances.
- For example, a student who lives in a car might refuse to do a writing assignment that requires him to describe the five things he likes best about his home.
- Another student who lives in a crowded shelter may be unable to complete an assignment that involves watching a particular television program.
- Another student living in a motel room might choose to be absent on his or her birthday if other classmates bring treats for everyone on their birthdays.
- Understand that: students may not be concerned about learning the state capitals or knowing how to compute the square root of 17 when they are preoccupied with how they are going to get their next meal, where they are going to sleep that night, how they are going to bathe, how they are going to wash their clothes, how they are going to obtain health and dental care, whether their mother is going to survive another beating by their father, or whether they are going to have to tolerate some form of sexual or physical abuse after they leave school.
- Students in homeless situations may not understand basic survival skills: how to bathe, how to wash clothes, how to spend money efficiently, how to apply for a job, how to live with structure, how to resolve conflicts without violence.
- Lack of essential health and dental care may hinder students' ability to attend school. If they do attend while suffering health or dental maladies, their ability to perform well in school is severely diminished.
- During extended vacation periods, some students without homes may suffer nutritional deficiencies since school meals are often their primary source of a balanced diet.

- The emergency needs of homeless children and youth, which can include medical and dental needs as well as food, housing, and clothing, are often left unmet.
- Students living in domestic violence shelters may not be able to leave the shelter for safety reasons.
- During extended vacation periods, younger children may be left alone in unsafe situations for long periods of time while their parents seek housing and employment.

TEN STEPS TO WELCOME STUDENTS LIVING IN TEMPORARY SHELTER

1. Welcome the student and the family when they arrive at school. Let them know that the school will provide a safe and stable environment. This will do more to ameliorate their concerns about enrollment in a new and often strange environment than almost any other thing you can do.
2. Introduce the student to the school site homeless advocate, a counselor, or other professional who will advocate for the child's school success.
3. Ask the name and location of the school the student previously attended. If they are coming from within the district, the student should remain at the school of origin (school placement should be in the best interest of the child).
4. Enroll the child immediately upon arrival at the school. We cannot afford to postpone a child's education because of bureaucratic red tape.
5. Verify immunization and identity records of the student. If these records are not available, request that they be sent via facsimile to you from the school nurse at previous school. If the student has not been immunized, refer them to the County Health Department. Depending on locale, the cost should be minimal or nothing (check local resource list for assistance).
6. Ask if the student had participated in any special or extra classes at the previous school. If the parent is unsure of specifics, contact the preceding school and request transcripts be sent via facsimile to you. If necessary, contact the preceding school counselor, classroom teacher, or principal to secure the correct information to place the student in the appropriate grade/class.
7. If the student has not been enrolled in school before, or has been out for an extended period of time, administer a brief academic assessment (basic math and literacy skills). Based upon this limited knowledge, enroll them in the appropriate class or grade.
8. Make sure transportation to school is available to the student if it is needed (school bus, public bus, bike, etc.). If necessary, contact district transportation official to include the student on the bus route.
9. Enroll the student in school breakfast/lunch program if necessary. If other basic needs are a concern, contact the referral source to let them know the family will be coming to access services that day.
10. Again, reassure family that this is a caring school environment. Give them the attached resource list (food, clothing, shelter) and the teacher's name(s) and classroom location(s), and school telephone number.